

~~4486~~
Nathaniel Hove: property

S E R M O N,

ON

4486.c.29
2

CHRISTIAN UNION;

Delivered in *Wrentham*, May 22, 1794,

AT A

PUBLIC FAST,

Appointed by the CHURCH and PASTOR, on Account of their
Ecclesiastical Difficulties;

And printed by their mutual desire.

By EZRA WELD, V. D. M.

PASTOR of the CHURCH in BRAINTREE.

*Let love be without dissimulation.
Be kindly affectioned, one to another, with brotherly love.
Follow after faith, love, patience, meekness.*

ST. PAUL.



PRINTED AT BOSTON,
BY E. W. WELD AND W. GREENOUGH,

At the MAGAZINE OFFICE, No. 49, State Street.

MDCXCIV.



TO THE
CHURCH of CHRIST in WRENTHAM.

REVEREND AND BELOVED,

MY compliance with your request for a copy of my sermon, preached at your fast, results rather from a hope of promoting, by my mite, the cause of order, and allaying the ferments of party contentions in the churches, than from any consciousness of my having, in any very acceptable and perspicuous manner, described the nature and importance of Christian union.

In your cause, I apprehend is embarked the general cause of the churches. If you must fall, by exparte measures, so may other churches, and all be buried in one general chaos of anarchy and confusion.

I earnestly wish that you and your contending brethren might, upon rational and gospel principles, mutually seek Zion's prosperity ; that as the road to walk in is, by

our divine Lord, pointed out in a manner too plain to be mistaken by his attentive and humble followers, you may inquire earnestly after it, and all carefully walk in it ; which cannot fail of the most happy issue.

That you, and your worthy pastor may be had in the holy keeping of the Great Head of the Church, and learn eminent obedience by the things you suffer, is the prayer of your very unworthy friend and servant,

THE AUTHOR.



A

S E R M O N.



I CORINTHIANS, xiii.

IS CHRIST DIVIDED ?

AT the time the Apostle wrote this epistle, the Corinthian church were much divided, and broken into parties, *having men's persons in admiration.* They were divided, peradventure ^{about} the respective abilities, and address of their teachers ; or possibly it was on account of real advantage which they had received, as, by their respective instrumentality, they were introduced into the knowledge of the truth. Overlooking the doctrines they taught ; and the nature and purity of the religion they inculcated, the character and respectability of their teachers became a subject of comparison and controversy. Some were decidedly for one, and some for another. Their commendations centered, rather in the instruments, than in the sacred truths they delivered.

DEEPLY

DEEPLY interested in the general cause, to which divisions in the church bore a most unfriendly aspect, the benevolent author of this epistle enters, most affectionately, into measures to suppress the growing evil ; rebuking them for their unreasonable and unchristian altercations ; beseeching them *by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ* that they all should *speak the same thing* ; and that *there should be no divisions among them* ; but that they should be perfectly joined together in the same mind ; and in the same judgment. And then puts the query we have chosen, as the foundation of the following discourse, viz. *Is Christ divided ? Is his Church, which is his body,* (Eph. 1. 23.) broken in pieces ? Are his members, (Eph. 5. 30.) fallen into contention ? Is the *one body in Christ*, (Rom. 12. 5.) multiplying itself, under different leaders, into *many* ? In a word, the animadversions of the apostle, were to condemn their dissensions, and persuade them *to be of one mind, and of one heart.*

OUR subject is, CHRISTIAN UNION.

THIS, in the subsequent considerations, we shall endeavour, hoping in divine direction, to describe and recommend.

THE Church of Christ, with the highest propriety, may be said to be ONE and INDIVISIBLE ; united so as is no other society on earth.

CHRISTIANS, considered collectively, are called *one body*, and *the body of Christ* ; and, as individuals, of whom this one body is composed, they are denominated *members*.

CHRIST

CHRIST prayed for his disciples, that they all might *be one, as he and his Father were one* ; and that they might *be one in them* ; united to the *Father*, and to the *Son*, and to *one another*.

CHRISTIAN UNION may be pointed out in the following particulars.

I. CHRISTIANS are united in Christ as their head: They are *one in him* ; and may not, and cannot, in this respect, be divided. The church, being *one body*, has only *one head*, one *king*, one *law-giver*, one *judge*. Believers derive from Christ, as the stock from the root, or the *branch from the vine*. *I am the vine*, said he, *ye are the branches*. They grow out of him, derive from him, and are his, not only as all other creatures are *his*, by creation ; but he *hath bought them*—made a purchase of them, *with his own blood* ; *created them anew* by his own Spirit, and thus *doubled and trebled*, as it were, his right in them, and to them ; and consequently, his sovereignty over them, as their absolute *head*, *Lord* and *owner*, is most eminently established.

THEY can belong to no other ; nor may any other usurp dominion over them ; or give them other laws ; or add to, or diminish from the statutes and ordinances, which he himself hath prescribed for their observation and obedience. As the natural body, composed of *many members*, is *ONE*, and under the direction of the head, as the seat of intelligence and information ; so the *body of Christ*, composed of *many members*, is *ONE*, and equally dependent on him,

as

as its *guide and teacher*. *He lighteth every man, who cometh into the world*. Hence, all who have assumed a power of teaching for doctrines, the commandments of men ; or of making laws ; or of adding any thing to the divine *code*, already provided by him for the direction and government of his people, have usurped his *sole* prerogative. Thus are all Christians *one* in, and under Christ, as their *head, law-giver*, and absolute proprietor.

2. THE church is considered as *one body*, as having, in all parts, and ages of the world, the *same laws, and ordinances* ; *one body*, under *one government*. The laws of Christ are the same, and equally suited to his people in every part of the world ; his ordinances are every where and by all to be obeyed, and to continue in unabated authority to the end of time. His body, which is the *church*, are every where, and, at all times, bound to walk in the same path, follow him as their *leader*, and obey him in every *command*. Worldly circumstances, situation, or station, neither increase or diminish obligation : The *prince* and the *beggar* are equally bound to immediate and cordial submission to *Messiah the Prince of princes, the King of kings, and Lord of the universe*.

THUS, the whole body of believers, by having the *same laws*, every where, and at all times, by which to govern their whole conversation, both with respect to themselves and others, are considered and treated as *one indivisible body* : *One people*, under *one head* ; and
every

every where, and in all ages, subject to the especial authority of this their *only*, and holy Sovereign.

3. THEY are united in having and embracing the *same doctrines*. The gospel is the divine source, from which they all draw their instruction : In this are contained the *words of eternal life*. The *Bible* is, every where *the book* of Christians ; the *compass* by which they are to direct their course through the wilderness to the *promised inheritance*. *If any man preach any other gospel*, he is by the benevolent apostle, given over to destruction : Let him be accursed.

ALL scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, (2. Tim. iii. 16.) And, as they are the doctrines of Christ, they are the treasure of Christians. He gives, and they *receive the truth*. His teachings come to *all*, are calculated for *all*, and are received by *all* as *one body*.

BUT that Christians are *united* in the same doctrines, may perhaps be viewed as wanting of evidence : We would therefore observe,

THAT an entire union, in this respect, is, doubtless, reserved to the approaching and happy period, when *all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest*.

THE present state of the world admits not of a complete harmony of sentiment, or conduct among mankind. How great the agreement, in opinion, between professing Christians, must be, in order to *Christian union*, may be hard, clearly, to determine ;

B.

and

and an attempt to mark out a line, which, in all cases, should be clear and satisfactory, might be an undertaking, to which we could not promise success; yet, we believe that a charitable union, so much recommended and inculcated, is by no means attended with insuperable difficulty.

THERE have been instances, and many such may still exist, wherein professing Christians too widely depart from one another, in point of doctrine, to consist with holy fellowship. There have been *damnable heresies* introduced among the people of God, both under the former and present dispensations, (2 Pet. ii. 1.) *But there were false prophets among the people; even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord, who bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.* These were *heresies*, which, as it were broke open, upon mankind, the sluices of immorality, and made a separation from their abettors, a necessary consequence.

IT is the *evil tendency* of a sentiment that renders it *pernicious*. Accordingly, the apostle, after mentioning the *damnable heresies*, above noted, adds in the next verse—*And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.*

ERRORS in judgment, among the professors of Christianity, are undeniably, *very* numerous; but we believe, such as are *damnable*, or involve the necessary

essary destruction of the subject, or violate the *union* of the church, are comparatively few.*

ONE general rule to assist the mind to a safe decision, with respect to the *tolerable* or *intolerable* nature of all *heresies, sects, doctrines, or sentiments*, is their *tendency*.

IF a doctrine in its influence be not dangerously unfriendly to the *moral* kingdom, though it should not endure the test of speculation, and be found subject to many objections ; he by whom it is propagated, is doubtless entitled to Christian candour and forbearance.

TRUTH and error may be so blended, as greatly to disturb the peace, and hinder the prosperity of the church, and yet the amount be far short of rising into the extreme of a disunion of its members. Every diseased limb is not *suddenly* or *certainly* to be *amputated* ; but measures of recovery are to be applied. There are to be adopted arts of healing, in *moral*, as well as in *natural* disorders. And as a maimed limb of the *natural* body may be incurable, and rendered, in a great measure, useless, and yet, on the whole, be consistently preserved in connexion with the rest ; so in the *spiritual*, a *member* may be very defective in speculation, or opinion, and yet be retained in *charitable* standing.

IN

* A CHARITABLE consideration of nothing but piety, in admitting to evangelical privileges, is a glory that the churches of New-England would lay claim unto.

Ratio dis. p. 92.

IN the *great fundamentals* of Christianity, in order to *Christian union*, there must be a *general* agreement. As by the *members of the body*, the *head*, with its superior influence and authority, all will allow, must be acknowledged ; so *Christ* and his *work* as the Saviour, all must allow are necessary objects of our faith, and dependence. With a rejection of these, *schism* is inevitably connected. In such a case, an utter alienation is established ; all reasons for Christian harmony and fellowship are removed.

VERY much according to their apprehensions of Christ, and his work as the Saviour, will be the fruits or general conduct of professing Christians. Great errors in religious sentiment, and depravity of moral conduct, usually attend one another ; but, we are happy to believe that there are no more than a few among the numerous sects in the Christian world, who, on account of their religious *tenets only*, ought to be esteemed *reprobate*.

TOUCHING sentiment, the subject is entitled to great candour, provided his external deportment be answerable to the spirit of Christianity. *By their fruits*, said our Lord, *shall ye know them*. If their fruit be apparently unto holiness, *love, joy, peace, long suffering*, &c. though we apprehend them in no small degree sentimentally erroneous, we believe them, however, at least to be objects of Christian candour and charity.

ERROR is ever to be resisted ; but the erroneous are not always to be rejected. The fruits of the
head

head and of the *heart* may be remarkably dissimilar.

WE should not be more curious in speculating *the tree* than *the fruit* it produces. If what presents itself for *a good tree* be *a thorn*, or *a thistle*, candour has no object. To look for *grapes* or *figs*, from stocks of such a description, would betray the greatest deficiency of judgment; but though the *tree* be less promising in its appearance, than might be wished, it may not, for this reason, be *plucked up* as a nuisance.

IN order to a safe procedure, let the *fruit* be carefully examined; if it be *good*, and nourishing, it announces *the tree* to be valuable.

IF *a tree bring forth evil fruit*, *hew it down*, and *cast it into the fire*; but not because its leaves and blossoms are not so sightly, and fragrant, as were desirable.

WE believe that the *great error* of the Christian world is discernable, rather in an intemperate zeal for religious sentiment and theories, than by any *superstitious scrupulosity* relative to the fruits of morality.

To *contend earnestly for the faith*, once delivered to the *saints*, is a duty by no means to be omitted; measures to *put to silence gainsayers*, with great and serious attention, are to be improved; the erroneous, by every devisable argument and winning motive, are to be attempted; but, after all, to look for a ground of charity, in the speculations of the mind, is a direct way

way to a mistaken conclusion ; it is an attempt to attain to the knowledge of another's character, very contrary to the method prescribed by the *Divine Teacher sent from God*.

IF, for Christians to walk together in *unity, or brotherly fellowship*, agreement in religious *speculation*, be necessary ; a cessation of communion, *till the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord*, must be the consequence. So long as the mind, in so many ways, remains subject to bias and prejudice, *candour* must supply the deficiency of *sentimental agreement* ; and *love* constitute almost the only *bond of union*, by which the Christian world is, or can be *united*.

As the scriptures seem not to have drawn a very full, or explicit line between *tolerable* and *intolerable heresies* ; or as their instructions relative to this matter, are left, not in *particular* definitions, but in descriptions of a more *general* nature ; we seem to be put under a necessity to decide upon them, very much by their *moral tendency*. Christians are united in receiving the *same doctrines*. This is true, *only* in a *general* view ; and their union in this respect must remain very *loose*, so long as moral corruption, and its attendant, blindness of mind, remain so *greatly predominant*.

4. CHRISTIANS are united in the *same religion, or Christian affection*. Between this, and sentimental agreement, there is an essential distinction ; as great as that between the heart and the head.

THE

THE *love*, whereby the true followers of Christ are distinguished from the world, is very often delineated in the *sacred writings*. In the 1st to the Corinthians, Chap. xiii. we have its nature and superlative excellency particularly described, under the denomination of *charity*. Without *this*, no gifts of *tongues* ; *prophecy* ; *knowledge* ; miraculous *power* ; no generous bestowments on the *poor*, or sufferings for religion ; none of these, *without love*, are of any avail. *Charity suffereth long and is kind ; Charity envieth not ; Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth : Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth.* This *disinterested* love to moral fitness and propriety ; to the general good and to individual rectitude and happiness, is *essential* religion, is the great bond of *Christian union* ; the *golden chain* of connexion between the *members of Christ's body*, by which they are *one and indivisible* ; and by which they are distinguished from all other societies.

THIS *holy* affection, which constitutes the religion of the gospel, is of a harmonious, uniting quality ; *it covers a multitude of sins* ; is *gentle, patient, meek, and forbearing* ; kind in controversy ; cautious in decision ; sparing of its censures ; *easy to be entreated* ; *full of good fruits* ; *without partiality, and without hypocrisy*.

WERE

WERE all the *members* of the spiritual body informed with *this divine ray* from the *sun of righteousness*, they would *indeed* be *inseparable* ; their communion *pleasant* ; highly *endearing*, and greatly *improving*. This is what clothes the church of Christ with the *beauty of Tirzah*, the *comeliness of Jerusalem*, and the *terrors of an army with banners*.

BUT here, with *studied brevity*, let us attend to the *directed* course, and *native tendency* of this kindly uniting affection, in forming and continuing the body of Christ in its *sacred union* and harmony.

IN case of offence, it is, by divine order directed, and by its own nature moved, to *private, careful, gentle, amicable*, and *winning* admonition of any, who may be known to wander from the *line* of duty. It perfectly coincides with the rule of procedure, in such cases *provided* by the benevolent Saviour, in Mat. xviii. 15, 16, 17. While it wishes to recover the offender, it seeks with a *mantle of love*, to cover his faults. If defeated in private endeavours, it proceeds on still in the prescribed line, to further essays of effectual discipline, to reform the offender.

THIS spirit of *love* in its wise and friendly endeavours, is the great *preserver* and *restorer* of order in the *house of God*, which is the *church of the living God*. It is upon itself, and upon others, a vigilant guard against sin. Ever friendly to *piety* and *virtue*, it stands opposed to their *opposites* ; it is the *guardian spirit*, and spring of all godly *discipline* in the church ; cannot quietly

quietly *suffer sin* upon a *member of the body* ; is assiduous in its inquiries into its own and the duty of others ; jealous, with a *Godly jealousy* over itself and fellow disciples ; and the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem are objects, in its view, of the highest account and consequence.

THIS is the *bond* of all *desirable union* in the churches. From *this* is derived all *pleasant* and *profitable* communion among the members of the body ; were it not for *this*, a falling off and separating from one another ; evil surmises ; secret plots ; hidden endeavours to circumvent ; want of candour, forbearance, and every thing of a kind uniting tendency, would be the evil condition into which the church must be plunged. This is the *sacred cement*, that connects, strengthens and adorns the *lively stones* of which the *house of God* is composed.

BUT *perfection* is a privilege in *reserve* ; it is a blessing in *future* to be enjoyed. At present, among the visible *members of the body of Christ*, we must expect to find such as are *totally wanting* of this *true uniting spirit*. And from these, more of evil than of good, is to be expected. In times of trial no dependence may be placed in their *friendship to truth*, or patience, and meekness, under the pressures of the cross ; wanting of the only quality that can render them steadfast and unmoveable ; instability must be the unhappy consequence. If love be wanting, peace, harmony, and religious order, cannot be maintained.

THIS unhappy mixture of character, among the professed members of Christ's body, renders the discipline of the church at once *necessary* and *difficult*, *trying* and *formidable*. And considering the imperfection of the best, and the *total want* of real goodness in many who make up the visible society of Christians in the world ; that the *unity of the Spirit* is so often violated, and the kingdom rent and torn by so many and increasing divisions, is nothing marvellous.

THESE dissensions can be no otherwise prevented or healed, than by the kind and tender application of the remedies, provided by the Great Head of the church, to wit, *gentle entreaty, admonition upon admonition, rebuke, exhortation* ; and, with respect to the incorrigible, *excision*.

BUT, *division* is most studiously to be guarded against ; and never submitted to, but upon the most *urgent necessity*. From the early days of the gospel, in order to a prevention of so great an evil, councils from other churches have been improved.

THE church is *one body*, for convenience locally separated into distinct societies ; which when falling into any difficulties, by themselves insuperable, have been wont to apply to other branches of the same body, for assistance and DECISION.*

WE

* By congregational principles, it is a truth, that a result of council mutually chosen by disagreeing parties in a church, is decisive. Not attending to our own established ecclesiastical regulations, is the only reason why church controversy cannot be terminated, but at the expense, both of the civil and religious happiness and prosperity of the society in which it occurs.

WE can entertain no apprehension that these distinct societies are *independent* of the great body of believers, or of one another, any more than a civil district is independent of the general government, in which it is involved. To conceive of the case in a different light, is to subject the kingdom of Christ to a situation, far more difficult, as to the maintenance of order, and an equitable settlement of any contentions which may occur, than is sufferable in *any* civil society; it is to leave it in a predicament, of all others, the most liable to fall into contention and ruin. Most wretched, and ignoble; how far from being *comely* and *beautiful* is that community, in whose constitution no provision is made, to check the heats of passion; or guard against the formidable effects of ANARCHY and PARTY oppression? This is the exposed situation of those churches, which are founded upon the plan of church government, called *independent*.* Their boasted liberty is, however, a subjection to the most alarming tyranny that can be imagined;

* By independents, are here meant those churches which contend, that as it is their right to call to, so it is also, to dismiss from, office, independent of all influence from council.

The congregational churches maintain that they have a power to call to, and to dismiss from office, under certain restrictions, which, in the present state of imperfection, are necessary as a prevention to the unhappy and injurious effects of a prejudiced party spirit.

That a pastor or his church; that any man, or body of men, may occupy the place of accuser and judge, in order to final decision, supposing the party condemned, wishes for an appeal from judgment, they allow not. This is a principle, which, in its natural operations, involves cruelty and oppression.

ed ; since, among them, the *accuser* is also the *judge* and *executioner* of the *accused*.

THE notion of independency of churches, as it is a division of the *one body of Christ* into many distinct, independent bodies ; so it lays them open to *division* upon *division*, and to mutual, unrestrained *injury* upon *injury*. They are in a situation, when controversies arise, that renders them wholly unsuitable for decision, allowing no license of appeal from their judgment. The *accuser*, the *interested* accuser, both by reason and religion, in sitting as a final judge, is out of his place ; because prejudice blinds the mind to truth, and exposes the *accused* to an award of *injustice* and *cruelty*.

HAS the wise and benevolent Head of the church left his body to the unrestrained lacerations of party contention ? Is the kingdom of Christ, of all others, the most inadequate for its own order and interest ? Is there no way for a just decision ; for a safe and closing issue of *ecclesiastical* controversy ? Or, of two parties, contending in the church, must the strongest, as in military rencounters, obtain the victory ?

SUPPOSE the contention be between a *minister* and his people, may he, as he is a party by himself, decidedly and alone, judge of and condemn them, and separate himself from them, when they can see no sufficient cause for such separation ? or, ought not his *opinion*, as in other cases, to be *subject* to the judgment of the *disinterested* ?

ON

ON the other hand, may the people, or brethren, when agreement between them and their pastor cannot, by him and them be obtained, go on to *accuse, hear, determine, judge, condemn, and execute*, without being *amenable* to the other parts of the body of Christ? Are such party decision and tyranny unsufferable in all other societies of men; and plausible only in the *Christian*? Is the moral kingdom, of all other kingdoms, far more exposed to the perplexing and ruinous effects of a tyrannical despotism? Is there nothing to restrain the rage of party, and curb the impetuosity of prejudice? Is it so, that party must decide against party, without a remedy? If it be *so* indeed, of the church it may be said, *she is terrible*; but where, saving in the description, shall we find those winning and attractive features—*fair as the moon; clear as the sun; beautiful as Tirzah; and comely as Jerusalem*?

AND further, upon *this supposition*, the result of the council at *Jerusalem*, (couched in terms of *authority and decision*, to wit, *we lay no other burden upon you*) tends to lead the mind into a mistaken conclusion, as being unapplicable to the *pleaded* independency of *churches*.

To *lay a burden* upon another is *indicative* of a binding authority, and denotes a power of *censure* and *excommunication* in the council, to which mutual application is made, over the party refusing submission. This is also agreeable to *congregational* principles, by which the churches, in general, in this part of the Christian world, have been regulated.

THUS

THUS the church, for local convenience, divided into many distinct communities, is *one body, the bride, the Lamb's wife*, and hath, in all its parts, and dispersions, the same *head, laws, doctrines and religion*, which is the *chief bond of their union*.

WE might go on to a further description of this *Christian union, in faith, ministry, sacraments, and final rewards* ; but to enlarge, on these particulars, would be a trespass on your patience.

WHAT has been said on *Christian union*, might now be followed, as was proposed, by a recommendation of it, in a variety of considerations ; such as, in this description, the church, is *terrible only to its enemies ; comely and beautiful in the eyes of its friends ; a place of safety ; a garden of pleasure and happiness ; a profitable school ; inviting to beholders ; undeniably the most excellent, honourable and desirable society on earth ; founded in the highest wisdom and benevolence—the city of the living God*—but it is already more than time to go on to some reflections, by way of *improvement*.

WHAT we have heard above, may well admonish us to a very tender and cautious delicacy, in all cases which respect the love, harmony and unity of Christ ; or *his body, which is the church*.

CHRISTIANS should attentively consider that their situation is now in the wilderness of temptation and trial, where that sacred affection *which covereth a multitude of sins*, is, of all others, the most excellent and
necessary.

necessary. *This* is not a patient, indifferent spectator of error, or wickedness; but a wise, prudent and benevolent monitor; a *dissuader* from evil, and a *prompter* to every thing laudable, or morally excellent. When the interest of the sacred body of Christ is, at any time, the subject of consideration; *caution*, *tenderness of charity*, and the *meekness of wisdom*, should attend, and mark out every step, lest the unity of the Spirit be *diminished*, rather than promoted. Hence, no *result* of council should ever be founded on *conjecture*, or *party* representation. Particularly terrible are the effects of *ex parte councils*, presuming to decide on the merits of points controverted; or of complaints exhibited, merely upon the authority or evidence of *interested accusers*. This is to judge without light, and, at random, to determine on cases, which require a far different treatment.* In such instances,

a

* *Ex parte councils* judging on the merits of a cause in controversy, without a careful hearing of the parties at variance, act a part which cannot be justified by any considerations whatever. Instances of such procedure ought to excite the immediate concern of the public, and be a leading and urgent motive in the churches to a revision of church platform.

When an accused party think they have reason to refuse a compliance with a request, made by their accusers for a mutual council; the latter have *this remedy*, viz. the calling an *ex parte* council. But such a council can never go into a hearing of the merits of the cause subsisting between the parties; and consequently cannot result upon them with the smallest degree of propriety, or decency.

Ex parte councils, can scarcely be said to be any thing better than *necessary evils*; and which call very loudly for *constitutional* remedy.

When contentions arise in churches, as they cannot be avoided, and very commonly, cannot be settled by the parties contending; in such cases, instead of sending for *ex parte council*, when *mutual* cannot be agreed upon, if there were,

a *council's* giving out a result, for the inspection of the public, affords reason to apprehend them, as having acted under the unhappy influence of *prejudice*. Or, when opinion is publicly given on matters of controversy subsisting between parties in contention, *as though they had been mutually heard*, when no such hearing has been had, we know not how to deem it any other, (however undesigned) than a *public deception*.

IN such a case, a *council's* assuming the denomination of *mutual* will by no means sanctify the transaction, or render their doings any the more compatible with *reason* or *religion*. No judicatory, *civil* or *sacred*, may be justified in such a procedure. We can have no right, *officially*, to credit any complaint, before the *accuser* and the *accused* be *had face to face*; or, in some other way, we hear, by good, uninterested evidence, what may be said on both sides in the contention. It is never to be expected that the complainant will bring forward considerations of defence, and put them in the most advantageous light of which
they

were, by *constitution*, the following steps provided; or any other that might be thought better calculated to prevent the evil of *ex parte* procedures, the consequences might be desirable; viz. let ten of the most contiguous churches be a number out of which *three*, or *five*, should be, by lot, appointed to decide upon the question, whether or not a council be necessary; and if judged necessary, these three, or five churches, should, by lot, appoint, out of the number of the *twenty* nearest churches, such a number as they should judge most convenient, which should be a mutual council to hear and determine upon the causes of difficulty subsisting, so as to put an end to controversy, to which *ex parte* councils are too generally a very great obstruction.

Humbly submitted,

F.

they are capable, and upon which the safety of the *accused* depends. If the *accused* be not present to make the defence, let the cause of his absence be faulty or not, the judgment made upon his case, without a hearing of his defence, *if right*, must be indebted, not to *knowledge*, but to *accident*.

OF *exparte* councils, we may not expect a result such as no other than a mutual can be under a capacity to exhibit ; nor can a *declaration* of mutuality authenticate an *opinion* on the state of the controversy, *which* has been formed only on a party hearing.

LET Christians, let councils, *mutual*, or *exparte*, be *cautious*, *tender* and *dispassionate* ; do as *they* would be done by. This, certainly, would, forever, preclude an event, so evil in its own nature, so wounding to Christianity, and so fatal to the *union* of churches, as is the ingrafting of an opinion, formed only from a *party* hearing, upon the stock of a *declared mutual council*. However, though charity, *which hopeth and believeth all things*, will not, or cannot give up the agent—yet the *conduct* is among the *hay and stubble*, *which must be consumed*.

To our deficiency in love and candour, is owing our, almost, every trial. Let it be our study, however diverse in opinion, to be *one* in *affection*. This, while we may see cause of mutual blame, will prevent the evil effects of passion, which distort the features, convulse the body, and separate the *members of Christ* from one another.

By the scenes of evil opened in *this place*, we wish much good to you, and to the churches in general, may be produced. The natural admonition is, that we *leave off contention before it be meddled with*. This church, with all the churches, have opportunity to learn much good from these evils of contention; especially from seeing the *want of system* in our procedures in church government; and the long protracted ecclesiastical contentions, which are no more than their natural consequences.

THE attending evils of controversy, are too many and formidable not to be greatly deprecated; and by the improvement of every wise and benevolent measure, not to be carefully guarded against. By *this*, how are temporal prosperity and *Christian social happiness*, in many instances, obstructed!

CHRISTIAN union, and Zion's prosperity are the same. This, where it prevails, renders the journey through the wilderness, though it be *disciplinary*, more than supportable, comfortable and pleasant. The *pilgrims*, united in affection, go on their way rejoicing; their communion is sweet and profitable.

IN the 133d Psal. we find king David, in contemplating the recommended subject of Christian union, breaking forth into an *impetus animi*, a rhapsody of praise and admiration. *Behold how good, and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity; it is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down*

down to the skirts of his garments. As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Many and great are its attendant blessings.

BUT, that carnal agreement be not put in the place of *Christian union*, great care should be exercised. Peace and unity in churches are not always *Christian virtues*. Churches may degenerate into carnal security ; and greatly, and for a long time, harmonize in error, and worldly mindedness ; may agree in a general neglect of duty to one another ; be pleased in *suffering sin* to have an unmolested course among the *members of the body* ; lay aside the appointed means for the order and purity of *God's house* ; and suffer the *vineyard* to be exposed, without a *hedge*, to the depredations of every *wild beast of the forest*.

THAT peace only is desirable, which is the result of a *benevolent Godly discipline*. The God of peace dwells *only* with communities of this description. He *abhors the excellency, and hates the palaces of Jacob*, when turned into *tents* of carnal ease and *wickedness*.

IN application of our subject to the church in this place, it is not for us to say, how far you may have deviated from the line of duty ; or been culpably accessory to the troubles and divisions into which you have fallen ; but that you, yourselves should, most seriously, inquire into, and determine this matter, is a duty urged upon you, both by the word and providence

dence of God. *In the day of adversity, consider. Is Christ divided?* his body torn, and rent, as it were, in pieces, among you? The procuring and sinful causes ought to be made a subject of the most serious inquiry.

THE ostensible reasons, upon which your dissensions are, not wholly, but chiefly grounded, are differences of opinion, relative to some religious sentiments. Those who have fallen off from the church for these, or other reasons, ought very seriously to inquire, whether they are indeed sufficient to justify such a procedure. If the tendency of a sentiment be not subversive of moral purity, and looks with a friendly aspect for the promotion of *piety and virtue*, they who abet it, cannot be supposed *meritoriously censurable*. To maintain the *unity of the Spirit*, in the *bond of peace*, Christian affection is necessary; but not *a harmony of sentiment*. That division of the members of Christ, on the foot of difference of sentiment, may be justified, the doctrine in dispute must be nothing short of *damnable heresy*; for we should not separate from one another, for any thing short of what demonstrates a separation from Christ himself. While we apparently hold to the Head, our fellow *members* should not cast us away as *withered and dead members*. By the candid spirit of the gospel, in the apostolic age, the *circumcision*, and *uncircumcision*, after some debates, charitably communed together in their holy profession.

TRUE religion in the *heart* makes great allowance for the very common mistakes of the *head*. Speculation

lation is a poor criterion for the exercise of Christian charity. In deciding on the characters of others, we are too apt to *strain out* these comparative gnats ; while, in other respects of much greater importance, we discover little or no concern at *swallowing a camel* ; nice about matters of speculation, while our attention to moral furniture, or deportment, is but *indifferent*.

WE cannot but believe, however mistaken we may be, that to the want of *candour*, and the exercise of *Christian affection*, the divisions in this place are greatly owing ; nor can we suppose it a too great presumption to say, that were *these* called in to your aid, your trials would soon be removed, to your mutual rejoicing. *Christian affection* is a powerful *healer of breaches*, and *restorer of paths to dwell in*. We wish greatly to see a genuine display of such a spirit among you, that *Christ divided* here may again be *united* ; and that the *waters once more may return and flow out from the sanctuary*, as before your contentions, for the nourishment of every tree in this part of the *great Christian vineyard*.

IN one word, *is Christ divided* by any fault of yours ? let no suitable means for a *reunion* be omitted. Let all prejudices be swallowed up of *candour*, and all unchristian resentments in the aboundings of *brotherly love*. Be candid and friendly to your minister—*strengthen his hands, and encourage his heart* ; pray, that

that he may be clothed with salvation, that he and you
all, may shout aloud for joy.



23 JY 68